

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT

TRANSPORTABLE RECYCLING CENTER

INVENTORS

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TRANSPORTABLE RECYCLING CENTER

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to the field of recycling containers and in particular to a device for housing a recycling center attendant or receiving device and facilitating collection, sorting and transportation of
5 recyclable materials.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Without limiting the scope of the invention, its background will be described with reference to a transportable recycling center as an example.

Recycling containers have been used to collect
5 recyclable materials such as glass, plastic and paper since public awareness prompted an interest in conserving natural resources. These containers usually are nothing more than a refuse container designated for collection of a particular material. Several containers, each for distinct
10 materials, may be located in a common area for consumer convenience. For example, separate containers may be labeled to receive each color of glass, different types of plastic and aluminum. Consumers may visit the area and deposit their various recyclable materials in the
15 corresponding containers.

One disadvantage to many recycling areas is that they may become cluttered with refuse and non-recyclable materials. Consumers may deposit improper materials in the containers or proper materials may be contaminated with an
20 excessive quantity of residual product, which may

contaminate other material in a container. If un-attended containers become full, consumers may simply leave the material near the container where it may be scattered by the wind or scavenging animals. Providing an attendant at
5 a recycling area that has many separate containers may only marginally improve cleanliness. It is difficult or impossible to monitor consumers at several different containers and cost prohibitive to assign an attendant to monitor each container.

10 One solution is to provide a recycling center that requires all material to pass through a screening process before it is placed in the container. Screening may be performed by an attendant or a reverse vending machine (RVM). Recycling centers of this type usually require a
15 permanent structure to house the attendant or to secure the RVM.

Permanent structures are expensive and consume valuable space. Because many recycling centers are located on the premises of retail stores, space taken by a
20 permanent structure reduces the number of customers that may be accommodated. Reducing the number of space for customers may result in lost profits. Additionally, a

permanent structure is difficult to move if a retailer needs to use the space in a different configuration or for a different purpose.

Therefore, a need has arisen for a recycling center
5 that will not allow the recyclable materials to become
mixed during collection. A need has also arisen for such a
recycling center that does not add significant cost or
complexity to the collection process. Further, a need has
arisen for such a recycling center that does not require
10 the costs or space associated with a permanent structure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention disclosed herein provides a transportable recycling center that has a container and a partition within the container. The partition separates a work area from a storage area. An attendant may accept
5 recyclable materials from consumers in the work area and store the recyclable material in the storage area. After the container has been filled with recyclable material, doors on the container may be secured and the container may be loaded onto a truck and transported to a recycling
10 facility.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a method for collecting recyclable materials is provided. The method includes the steps of placing a transportable recycling center at a location, receiving recyclable
15 materials, sorting the recyclable materials, storing the recyclable materials in the transportable recycling center, and removing the transportable recycling center from the location.

In another embodiment of the invention, a recycling
20 collection system includes a collection location and a

transportable recycling container located at the collection location. A partition within the transportable recycling container defines a work area and a storage area.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, including its features and advantages, reference is now made to the detailed description of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in
5 which like numerals identify like parts and in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a recycling center incorporating certain embodiments of the invention;

Figure 2 is a plan view of a recycling container incorporating certain embodiments of the invention;

10 Figure 3 is an elevation view of a recycling container incorporating certain embodiments of the invention; and

Figure 4 is an end view of a recycling container incorporating certain embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While the making and using of various embodiments of the present invention are discussed in detail below, it should be appreciated that the present invention provides many applicable inventive concepts which can be embodied in
5 a wide variety of specific contexts. The specific embodiments discussed herein are merely illustrative of specific ways to make and use the invention and do not delimit the scope of the invention.

Referring now to Figure 1, therein is depicted a
10 recycling center 10 that may be placed at a location such as a parking lot of a retail store, for example. The recycling center 10 has a recycling container 12 that may be configured to store recyclable material and house an attendant. As a result, the recycling container 12 may be
15 a stand-alone recycling center 10 that does not require permanent structures to be erected at the location. Additionally, the recycling center 10 is completely portable and may be easily moved among different locations.

A front door 14 allows the attendant to access the
20 container 12. The attendant may receive recyclable

materials from a consumer through the front door 14. After the container 12 is sufficiently full of recyclable material, the front door 14 may be secured and the container 12 may be transported to a recycling facility.

5 The recyclable material may be emptied from the container 12 through a rear door 16. The container 12 may be emptied like a dump truck by opening the rear doors 16 and tilting the container 12 rearward. The recyclable material may then be dumped in an appropriate location at a recycling
10 facility.

A recycling center 10 may contain various accessories such as a compactor 32, a power supply 34, a table 36, a light 38 and a scale 40, for example. The container 12 may also contain a reverse vending machine (RVM) 42, discussed
15 in greater detail herein below. One or more of these accessories may be used to help the attendant receive and store recyclable material. All of the accessories may be stored and transported within the work area 20. During
20 hours of operation, some accessories may be moved outside the container 12 to free space within the work area 20. During other hours, accessories may be stored within the work area 20 and secured by locking the front door 14.

The compactor 32, the light 38, and the scale 40 may be powered by the power supply 34. The power supply 34 may be electricity supplied by power distribution wires from the retail store or some other source. The power supply 34 may also be portable, such as a gas-powered generator or a battery, for example. In one embodiment, the power supply 34 may be a rechargeable battery, which may be charged every evening in the retail store. In this particular example, the power supply 34 may be a cart that the attendant may easily move to and from the retail store. The power supply 34 may be used during hours of operation and re-charged in the retail store during other hours.

As shown in Figure 2, a partition 18 may divide the container 12 into a work area 20 and a storage area 22. The partition 18 may be located in the container 12 to provide adequate room for an attendant to perform collection services in the work area 20 and maximize storage volume in the storage area 22. The work area 20 shelters the attendant from adverse weather conditions and also defines a space where the attendant may read or relax during slow collection times.

Partition doors 19 in the partition 18 allow access from the work area 20 to the storage area 22. The partition doors 19 may also separate the work area 20 from recyclable materials in the storage area 22, which helps to
5 promote a clean, safe and visually appealing recycling center 10.

The storage area 22 of the container 12 may have one or more holding bin(s) 24 to keep different varieties of recyclable materials separate. The holding bin 24 may be
10 particularly useful to safely store recyclable materials such as glass. Several holding bins 24 may be individually designated to receive, e.g., various colors of glass. The holding bins 24 may have individually operable dividers or doors (not depicted) to facilitate emptying the contents of
15 the holding bins 24 while maintaining separation among the different types of recyclable materials. Each holding bin 24 may be emptied in independent succession at the proper location in the recycling facility.

As shown in Figure 3, the holding bins 24 may be
20 accessed from the interior of the container 12 by bin lids or from the exterior of the container 12 through a portal 26. Typically, an attendant may access the holding bins 24

from the interior of the container 12. However, as the interior of the container 12 becomes full of other recyclable material, access to some holding bins 24 from the interior of the container 12 may be difficult or impossible. As the container 12 becomes full, the attendant may deposit appropriate recyclable material into the holding bins 24 through the portal 26.

For example, if the attendant has stacked newspapers or even biscuits of high-density polyethylene in front of the holding bin 24 that is designated for green glass, the attendant may load additional green glass from the exterior of the container 12 through the portal 26 that is designated for green glass.

As shown in Figure 4, the portals 26 may be covered by exterior portal doors. These portal doors may be secured to prevent unauthorized access to the holding bins 24, to protect the interior of the container 12 from environmental conditions, and to retain the recyclable material in the holding bins 24 during transportation. The interior bin lids may also be secured to prevent recyclable material such as glass, for example, from prematurely exiting the holding bins 24 during transport.

Collecting recyclable materials begins by transporting the container 12 to a suitable collection location such as the parking lot of a grocery store, for example. The entire recycling center 10 may be transported to and from the parking lot by a truck. Skids 28 or wheels 30 on the container 12 may facilitate loading the container 12 onto the truck. The front door 14 and the rear door 16 may be secured during transportation to retain the contents of the container 12.

10 In operation, consumers may return recyclable materials to the recycling center 10 and receive a deposit refund or a cash value for the recyclable material. The attendant may receive recyclable material from the consumer. The scale 40 may be used to weigh the recyclable material and determine the cash refund due to the consumer. The attendant may then sort the recyclable material and store it within the storage area 22. Some recyclable material may be placed in the holding bins 24 to store it separately from other recyclable material. The compactor 32 may be used to compact some or all of the recyclable material and increase the storage capacity of the container 12. As more completely described below, compacting the

recyclable material allows more recyclable material to be stored in the container 12.

In some instances, a consumer may be able to return recyclable material during hours that the recycling center
5 10 is closed. One embodiment of the invention may include a RVM 42 in the container 12. The RVM 42 provides an automated refund to customers who deposit recyclable materials if an attendant is not present.

The dimensions of the container 12 may be adjusted to
10 facilitate transportation or to minimize the space required in the parking lot. In one embodiment, for example, the container 12 is eight feet wide, eight feet, nine inches tall, and seventeen feet long. The container 12 may have these dimensions to satisfy highway transportation
15 regulations and minimize the "footprint" of the container 12, which measures eight feet by seventeen feet in this particular example. A small footprint may be desirable because many retail store owners highly value the space available for customer parking. More parking translates to
20 more customers and, therefore, more sales. The retail store owner is better served by the container 12 if it

consumes less parking area than an alternative recycling center.

Although the container 12 consumes relatively little area on the parking lot, total recyclable material storage capacity is similar to larger containers because of the interior configuration and compaction techniques. Exterior dimensions that fulfill space and transportation requirements must be balanced with interior dimensions to maximize storage capacity. The recycling center 10 may be equipped with a compactor 32 to crush various recyclable materials. The compactor 32 allows an attendant to crush recyclable material into biscuits, which may be neatly stacked in the storage area 22 of the container 12. Compacting recyclable materials increases the storage capacity of the container 12 by increasing storage density.

While this invention has been described with reference to illustrative embodiments, this description is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications and combinations of the illustrative embodiments, as well as other embodiments of the invention, will be apparent to persons skilled in the art upon reference to the description. It is, therefore, intended

that the appended claims encompass any such modifications or embodiments.